

Juvenile offenders work to watch games

By Joel Mills of the Tribune

Eight inmates at State Juvenile Corrections Center get to help out at Series as a reward for good behavior



Residents of the Juvenile Detention Center at Lewiston haul supplies into the ball park during the N...

"Take me out to the ballgame," isn't just a request made by fans of this week's NAIA World Series. For some, it is a privilege.

Instead of being locked up in the State Juvenile Corrections Center in Lewiston, eight young men are performing odd jobs like trash collection between games.

Center Director Terry Lewis said they are all being rewarded for their good behavior, and working toward a successful re-entry into the outside world.

"It's a kudos to them," he said. "It's their award, and they earned it. They're also here to learn accountability. They're here to learn responsibility."

Russell, an 18-year-old from Sandpoint who wasn't allowed to give his last name, said he recognizes that learning to control his actions over the last several months was the first step to getting his life back on track.

"It shows that I'm not a jerk any more," he said.

When he was 17, Russell said he wasn't getting along with his mother, and decided to run away from home. He ended up in the Juvenile center after he stole a car in an attempt to accomplish his plan.

Getting to work at the series was an extra motivator, Russell said, because he wants to enroll at host school Lewis-Clark State College, primarily to get an education, but also to possibly play baseball for the Warriors.

Russell is set to enter an independent living program later this week, starting with a maintenance job at Hells Gate State Park. Then he will hopefully be released on probation June 8.

Zack, 18, also couldn't give his last name. The Rathdrum native should get out on July 1 after spending a year in detention. A fight with his father led to disturbing the peace and malicious injury to property charges that landed him at the juvenile center, he explained.

His first couple of months at the center were marred by several fights, Zack said. But since then, he's improved his behavior enough to earn an invitation to the series crew.

"It shows that you're willing to change and be a successful person in society," he said.

His dad got him a job installing custom counter tops upon his release. After that, he plans on enlisting in the Army.

Goals like that act as additional motivation to keep his act together, he added.

"To do that, I have to get off probation."

Lewis said the juvenile offenders are also part of a new model of community service the corrections department is developing. Called "restorative justice," it directs community service work done by juvenile inmates at repaying the victims of juvenile crime for their property and other losses, he said.

"It's a unique model that's not being practiced anywhere else," Lewis said.

For instance, some work at Winchester Lake State Park was repaid with free campsite access for some victims, he said.

Lance Acord coordinates the volunteers' LCSC work for the juvenile center. He said restorative justice offers more than the tangible results seen after a traditional community service project.

One benefit is the lesson learned about contributing to society, rather than just taking from it.

"Some of the guys mentioned that they can't wait to volunteer in their communities," Acord said.